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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by International Network of Liberal Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-61872 (E) 221211

Please recycle

Statement

Review theme: financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

The activities of International Network of Liberal Women are inspired by the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The organization uses those principles, which are the basis for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The main objectives of the organization are to develop awareness of women concerning their rights and political, economic, social and cultural responsibilities, to reinforce the relationships and the exchange among women from all over the world and to promote the application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The International Network of Liberal Women notes the following:

- That the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly are important contributions to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- That the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the commitments to gender equality and the advancement of women contained therein were treated in the United Nations summits, conferences and special sessions.
- That the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women has helped to reinforce the gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- That, in some countries, there is an inappropriate distribution of human and economic resources and, in some areas, there is a poor comprehension of the political significance of equal opportunities for men and women concerning topics such as the participation of women in democracy and women's human rights and, consequently, there is a lack of political will and a lack of legal measures to establish efficient implementation.

The International Network of Liberal Women therefore proposes for review:

- That proven experiences of investing in women and girls have a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency, sustained economic growth and the eradication of poverty, especially among women.
- Analyses of revenues and expenditures in all policy areas in order to enhance the contribution of Government expenditure and accelerate the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.
- The allocation of adequate resources for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in the workplace, including unequal access to labour market participation and wage inequalities, as well as reconciliation of work and private life for both women and men.
- The development, financing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender-positive policies and programmes, as well as legislative and administrative reforms aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship and private initiative, including through microfinance, microcredit and

cooperatives, and assistance to women-owned businesses in participating and benefiting from, inter alia, international trade, technological innovation and transfer, investment, knowledge and skills training.

The International Network of Liberal Women also proposes to:

- Urge developed countries that have not yet done so, in accordance with their commitments, to make concrete efforts towards meeting the target of dedicating 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to official development assistance for developing countries.
- Ensure the full and effective participation of women in deciding and implementing development strategies and integrating gender concerns into national programmes to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- Enable the full representation and full equal participation of women in political, social and economic decision-making and governance, in particular in economic and public finance policies, in order to guarantee the formulation of all plans, programmes and policies.

Conclusion

The added experience brought by women can be a source of hope for the future. If they are given the opportunity and allowed to act, women are well placed to meet the challenges that the future brings us.

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Statement submitted by the International Public Policy Institute, Pathways to Peace, the Women's Intercultural Network and the Women's World Summit Foundation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

Convening a fifth United Nations/non-governmental organizations world conference on women and girls

We urge the Commission on the Status of Women, at its fifty-sixth session, to support and facilitate the holding of a fifth United Nations/non-governmental organizations world conference on women and girls by sending the present statement to the Secretary-General, the General Assembly and all United Nations entities concerned about the situation of women and girls. The target date for the conference is 2015, 20 years after the holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Rather than being an end in itself, such a conference would be a major step towards ensuring that human and women's rights are considered as one and the same, and that peace and sustainability become possible through the establishment of equality between men and women in decision-making.

The fifth world conference on women and girls would make widespread use of the Internet and technology, which make it possible for people everywhere to be aware of issues and solutions: what delegates will say, hear, see and learn could be shared worldwide through live-streaming technologies and social networking tools, and by 2015, yet more technology will be available for this purpose. We envision that technology will link the fifth world conference with local women's conferences held throughout the world. The themes that would be addressed at the fifth world conference could be coordinated with and applied to local, regional or national concerns. Individuals at the conference would be able to communicate directly with their home circles, communities and local conferences. Events and presentations would educate, appeal to and inspire others to find out what is happening to women and girls worldwide, as well as learn what women and girls are accomplishing. Knowledge empowers, role models inspire and ideas lead to other ideas. As we saw with the United States civil rights and women's movements and in the demonstrations for democracy that took place in Arab countries in the spring of 2011, when a critical number of people change perceptions and expectations, ideas that had been resisted or suppressed become widely accepted and this, in turn, changes institutions and culture.

A fifth world conference on women and girls would develop the next generation of global and local women leaders with an international vision. The United Nations world conferences on women were critical to the development of the women who attended them. Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, spoke before the Commission on the Status of Women about this in 2009. These conferences help shape and support women's vision and spirit, and allow them to exchange practical and political help through the friendships and alliances they make. In the context of the 15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women), there was further evidence of how important it is to attend such conferences, as well as an awareness that most of the women who attended the above-mentioned conferences are now over 50 years of age. In order to have a next generation of global and local women leaders with an international outlook and global connections with one another, a fifth world

conference on women and girls is needed. Such an event is especially important for creating and mobilizing an intergenerational, effective leadership. Younger women leaders could be mentored and inspired by the people they would meet and by what they would learn at the conference. Women collaborate with empathy and, by sharing stories, they can support each other and work towards similar goals. E-mail, Facebook and Skype will help strengthen bonds between individuals and organizations attending the conference.

The influence of a fifth world conference on humanity and the planet would be all the greater if the broadest cross-section of women attended. The intention is to include women who represent different cultures, are of different skin colours and come from different geographical regions, economic backgrounds, including rural and impoverished areas. Consciousness-raising among women about their common concerns and different challenges leads women to learn from and support each other across borders and social and ethnic differences that would otherwise keep them separated. With diversity being a priority, plans for a fifth world conference must, from the beginning, be inclusive.

Furthermore, it should be financially possible for women from non-governmental organizations in rural and impoverished areas to attend; such aid could be awarded through a scholarship, which would be an honour and a source of pride for the organization.

Circles are an effective concept for women to mobilize around deeply held values. The archetypes of sisterhood and motherhood connect women at a deep level; women become conscious of this when they have the opportunity to meet in circles. To support this outcome and to increase collaboration and support among women, we encourage the use of circles during the preliminary process and at the fifth world conference. Circles are the oldest, most widespread and most effective tool for creating personal and social change (T. A. Thompson, "Circles of change", *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Fall 2011). Networking that begins in a circle has a foundation of trust based upon vision and support.

For peace and sustainability, political decisions should be made and budgets decided upon without interminable conflicts, economic risk-taking or threats of aggression. Women's involvement in such activities is vital. We know that women respond to stress differently than men. Women reduce stress by sharing perceptions, feelings and strategies. This is called the "tend and befriend" response. This response, which is hormonally driven, supports dialogue, collaboration and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Research supports the designation of women as the "empathic gender" (Simon Baron-Cohen research summation, 2003), in contrast to the male "fight or flight" response to stress. In general, the female brain is geared towards assessing the feelings and intentions of others, engaging in communication and defusing conflict. By contrast, in men, whenever stress is experienced as a threat to status or territory, fear, anger and aggression come to the fore.

A fifth world conference for women and girls would support the implementation of United Nations documentation on women's empowerment and equality, including Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, General Assembly resolutions on the girl child, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recommendations for gender equality and equal participation of women in decisions on the environment. A fifth world conference would raise consciousness about the

importance of these documents and the need for their implementation. The conference requires the backing of a critical number of empowered women and women in high positions. Mobilization of women on their own behalf has been the most effective and often the only reason for the gains made so far.

A fifth world conference would support a women's agenda and help create the political will to create a world where children, and therefore everyone, would not fear physical or psychological violence, where there is enough good food to eat, clean air and water, health care, education and the freedom to think, speak, create and love. A fifth world conference would energize the global women's movement towards this end.

The holding of a fifth world conference has grass-roots support. Advocacy efforts for such a conference began in 2002, with the presentation of the "millionth circle initiative" (see J. S. Bolen, *The Millionth Circle*, 1999) at conferences and, beginning in 2005, at the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women. Panels and workshops have been held at parallel events each year since 2007. A petition that was posted online in 2009 now has 13,600 signatures (see www.gopetition.com/petitions/5WCW/html). A conference website (www.5wcw.org) has been established as an online information centre. Member States to initiate and support the preparation of a General Assembly resolution calling for the holding of a fifth United Nations/non-governmental organizations world conference on women and girls.

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Statement submitted by Legião da Boa Vontade, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

The fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women offers an opportunity for the international community to improve the situation of rural women through policies that promote gender equality, reduce poverty and generate economic growth. The theme of the session invites Governments, international agencies and civil society to work together to provide a long-term solution for these global challenges. Such a solution demands quality education for girls and women, especially in rural areas, giving them the necessary tools to overcome their current situation and, at the same time, become leaders of their local community working towards sustainable development.

Today, more than half of the world's population lives in rural areas. Rural women play a significant role in the global economy and contribute to a large portion of agricultural labour in many parts of the world. Despite this fact, rural women are often overlooked and continue to be affected by poverty and hunger. Most importantly, they continue to have less access to education than their male counterparts. In an attempt to help close the gap of gender inequality in rural areas, Legião da Boa Vontade (Legion of Good Will) presents this statement, which highlights its successes in the field of women's education. Furthermore, the organization provides a model for the creation of equal opportunities for all and also for the development of long-term solutions to global crises.

Education, particularly the education of girls and women, must be the central strategy in addressing the inequality that affects rural women. This emphasis on education is one of the central tenets of the organization. As an internationally recognized social, educational and humanitarian organization, it provides accessible and quality education to all. Legião da Boa Vontade currently operates in seven countries: Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Paraguay, Portugal, the United States of America and Uruguay, and has over 62 years of experience in creating positive changes. As a result, the organization has much to contribute in discussions regarding education. In particular, it has always addressed the needs of women; in fact, women are the direct beneficiaries of nearly 85 per cent of more than 8.5 million services provided annually by the organization. Therefore, now more than ever before, a brief examination of the pedagogical practices and philosophies of the organization is needed; it will serve as an invaluable tool in helping close the global gender inequality gap.

One of the central tenets of Legião da Boa Vontade is the belief in the transformative power of education. The organization believes that quality education provides the answer to many of life's challenges. As a result, the organization provides a wide variety of educational services, including but not limited to: offering job training to the unemployed; teaching pregnant women how to prepare for motherhood; and providing educational activities that help create and foster a culture of peace for youth. The organization emphasizes this belief in quality education through its creation of numerous preschools, schools, shelters and community centres. It also provides immediate material assistance, which may help remedy global problems such as hunger or poverty. The organization conducts an annual Christmas campaign, which distributes 1,200 tons of non-perishable food baskets to over 70,000 families. It recognizes, however, that provision of material goods is a temporary solution to hunger or poverty; the permanent solution to poverty eradication is education. By providing long-term benefits for all members of a given society, education helps break the vicious circle of poverty and social exclusion.

Legião da Boa Vontade emphasizes the importance of providing girls and women with equal access to education. The hope for a universally educated world depends on the equal inclusion of girls and women in education, because women naturally transfer their education to their family members. Recognizing the positive result of this trend, the organization has created various programmes for women, particularly pregnant women. The "Baby citizen programme", as developed by the organization, provides pregnant women from all socio-economic backgrounds with all-encompassing care. They are provided with multidisciplinary care and education as they embark on the path towards motherhood. The women receive medical and psychological care, as well as information about the physical implications of pregnancy and childbirth. Last but not least, they are assisted in developing important core values — love, solidarity and compassion — that will help them as mothers. Most importantly, they can instil these values in their children and help foster a culture of peace. After all, as the president of the organization states "World stability begins in the hearts of children".

The emphasis placed on developing the individual's core values is another principle of the educational philosophy of Legião da Boa Vontade, which stresses the importance of acquiring and developing values and emotional intelligence in addition to learning factual knowledge. This is exemplified in the Baby citizen programme and in every programme. The programmes offered by the organization are rooted in what the organization calls ecumenical spirituality, a philosophy best illustrated in the New Testament commandment of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Gospel according to John, 13:34). Ecumenism, therefore, refers to the harmonious and universal relation among all human beings, regardless of religious beliefs or difference of opinion. In this philosophy of ecumenical spirituality, love is the essential instrument that enables one to channel knowledge to do good actions.

The Baby citizen programme is one of many examples of the organization's commitment to providing a multidisciplinary education. It operates pre-primary, primary and secondary schools in various countries. These schools provide quality education free of charge and without any sort of gender bias, academic or otherwise. Furthermore, the schools combine excellent classroom education with a wide variety of services that enable students to grow as "bio-psychosocial spirit-beings". In other words, schools operated by Legião da Boa Vontade have health professionals on staff to provide students with medical, dental and nutritional care, as well as psychologists to address the children's learning difficulties and/or behavioural disorders. Furthermore, as part of the all-encompassing programme, the organization's schools have social workers who can work with the families of students to overcome challenges, such as poverty and unemployment.

Legião da Boa Vontade is also renowned for its educational philosophy known as the "Pedagogy of affection and ecumenical citizen pedagogy", developed by its president, Paiva Netto. These pedagogies are concerned with promoting an education that is capable of supplying the needs of the brain and the heart and shows us that all students can manifest their knowledge from the inside out. That is, each person has an inner potential in addition to his or her cultural background, which further enhances his or her skills and abilities. This educational practice sees the individual in its entirety, as a "bio-psychosocial spirit-being" and intends to shed more light on cultural, social and intellectual aspects of knowledge, by giving room to universal values and ecumenical spirituality.

This educational philosophy has enjoyed tremendous success in the schools run by Legião da Boa Vontade. Despite the fact that the organization's schools often operate in areas marred by violence, there are no instances of student violence. This is because the organization has successfully instilled the value of feeling and expressing fraternal love, solidarity and compassion in its students. Most importantly, the students carry these values throughout their entire lives. These pedagogies have, therefore, helped thousands to overcome difficult situations, including but not limited to: domestic abuse, unemployment, poverty and depression. Furthermore, the schools develop students' intellect. As a result, the organization's schools create productive and compassionate members of society. The success of the pedagogies is documented by the fact that many former students return to the organization as caregivers and professional resources.

In addition to schools, the "Pedagogy of affection and ecumenical citizen pedagogy" is also practised at shelters and community centres run by Legião da Boa Vontade. It is utilized with more functional education, such as job training seminars and language classes. These classes target the needs of those, particularly women, who seek a multidisciplinary education that contains both practical and philosophical teachings. This exemplifies the organization's commitment to providing an all-encompassing education that supplies individuals with the tools necessary to nurture and sustain their spiritual, psychological, intellectual and emotional needs.

The experiences and the successes of Legião da Boa Vontade are directly relevant to the problems addressed by the current session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Education must be the central part of any strategy that the international community chooses to pursue, because it is only through education that girls and women in rural areas can become empowered. In addition, providing access to education for girls and women is the key to hunger and poverty eradication. Education will not only help families break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion, it will also enrich the community with long-term benefits. The experience and successes of the organization have shown, however, that a wider definition of education is needed. There is a need for a new type of education, a curriculum that targets both the brain and the heart, an education that is capable of developing the child's intellect while instilling and nurturing core values within the child. This education should be available to all, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, economic background or any other criteria. This is important because women and girls, and their male counterparts, should have equal access to education and financial, physical and social assets. After all, women are the natural educators of the family, they have always been and will continue to be the agents of educational dissemination.

The organization's pedagogies demonstrate the transformative power of quality education in the lives of girls and women in addition to the betterment of their local community. This achievement is made possible thanks to the multidimensional approach practised by the organization's various social and educational programmes. From this experience, the organization recommends a broader discussion on fostering an all-encompassing educational system that embraces the development of the person as a whole. In the words of the president of Legião da Boa Vontade "take care of the spirit, reform the human being and everything will transform itself".

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Statement submitted by Mother's Union, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

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Please recycle

Statement

Mother's Union is a worldwide Christian organization with 4 million grass-roots members living in 84 countries, many in rural areas and the poorest countries of the world. Members volunteer their time to support family life and to empower women, through prayer, campaigning and enabling activities. While rural women are not one homogenous group, our rural members and the women in their communities face a number of common challenges throughout the course of their lives, as described below.

Health

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 1,000 women die each day from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Of those women, 99 per cent die in the developing world. Maternal mortality is higher in rural areas, where women are less likely to receive adequate antenatal health care and more likely to be poor.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), of the 34 million people living with HIV/AIDS, 95 per cent live in the developing world. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, within those countries, more people living with HIV reside in rural areas, although accurate infection rates are hard to measure as cases are more likely to go unreported.

WHO reports that, across the world, 884 million people still lack access to safe water and, according to the United Nations Development Programme, millions of rural women and children spend several hours each day collecting water, often from distant and polluted sources.

Education

The World Bank reports that gender gaps in primary education have closed in almost all countries. In secondary education, these gaps are closing rapidly. Yet, according to the *Millennium Development Goals Report 2010*, hope dims for universal education by 2015, even as many poor countries make tremendous strides. Rural children are twice as likely to miss out on education as urban children and 31 per cent of rural girls are out of school, compared with 27 per cent of rural boys. Rates vary globally, but rural women are more likely than urban women to be illiterate.

Employment and income generation

In many parts of the world, casual work in agriculture provides the main employment opportunity for poor rural women. That work is often low paid, offers no social protection and poses greater risks to health. While rural women produce more than 55 per cent of all food grown in developing countries, the World Bank reports that they are less likely to own the land they farm. According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development, trade liberalization and protectionist agricultural trade policies of the developed world continue to have a negative impact on the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in developing countries, who produce a third of the world's food.

Food security

Currently, 925 million people across the world are experiencing hunger. Oxfam reports that, out of those who are undernourished, around 80 per cent are thought to live in rural areas. It is also estimated that 60 per cent of the chronically hungry are women and girls.

Gender-based discrimination and violence

Estimates of gender-based violence vary across the world, but it affects women and girls in rural areas as much as in urban areas. In England and Wales, for example, a 2008 study by Bristol University and the National Federation of Women's Institutes found that 52 per cent of rural women and 56 per cent of urban women had experienced violence or abuse.

Transport

Accessing water, food, health care, education and employment is dependent on a decent transport infrastructure, including land, water and air pathways. It is also important in enabling access to decision-making power, as local and national Governments are usually based in urban cities, towns and villages. Older and poorer women are particularly disadvantaged by lack of public transport.

Health and education inequalities, poverty, hunger, discrimination and isolation are all barriers to rural women's empowerment. Members of Mother's Union run a number of projects and programmes that help remove such barriers and thus enable women and their families to flourish. Through a literacy and financial education programme in Burundi, Malawi, the Sudan and South Sudan, trained facilitators bring together and lead literacy circles, teaching women and men literacy and numeracy skills using participatory learning methods. During the process, the participants, approximately 70 per cent of whom are female, discuss issues affecting their communities; build self-confidence and capacity to self-organize; and, once literate, are also trained to form savings and credit groups. The loans, savings and budgeting training enable many group participants to develop new businesses, most of which tend to be agriculture based, for example trading in plants, growing vegetables, raising goats and chickens and selling agricultural produce. The activities have resulted in a higher and more stable income for many of the rural women participating in the programme. Throughout the programme, participants also discuss gender roles, for example, by analysing how men and women spend their time each day, in order to highlight the inequalities women face and to challenge the social norms that perpetuate such inequalities. That sensitization has led to improved family relationships for participants and to women participating more actively in their communities.

In Uganda, a family life programme aims to fight poverty and sickness within rural communities. Mother's Union development workers and family life trainers bring together local groups to help them identify issues affecting their well-being, such as health problems and environmental degradation, and ways to bring about change and improvements in their community. Solutions include building pit latrines and simple hand-washing facilities, planting fruit and vegetable gardens and building energy efficient stoves. Family life groups have also set up model homes across 10 regions to demonstrate their innovations. Groups are also set up to meet

the needs of particular cohorts, such as groups for women only, men only, young people, those with disabilities and those living with HIV/AIDS.

To further the empowerment of rural women, the underpinning value of equality between women and men must also be upheld through international agreements, national law and local custom. Learning from practical experience, Mother's Union believes that policies must be put in place, from the local to the global level, to eliminate the health and education inequalities, poverty, hunger, discrimination and isolation that disproportionately affect women.

Mother's Union recommends that national Governments should:

(a) Improve and expand local services and resources in rural areas in the areas of:

- Health, by opening more, sufficiently resourced, accessible health-care facilities with trained doctors, nurses and midwives; and improving treatment and awareness of HIV/AIDS and other common diseases.
- Education, by continuing to work towards achieving Goals 2 and 3 of the Millennium Development Goals; and providing or funding quality, accessible adult education and skills training relevant to the rural and wider national context.
- Work and income generation, by ensuring the rights of women to own land and property; supporting and promoting women's access to credit, enterprise and other resources; supporting the diversification of employment in rural areas; and investing in quality, affordable childcare provision during and around working hours.
- Ending violence against women, by ensuring as a matter of priority that the justice system is accessible to rural women; and funding quality, accessible support services for victims of gender-based violence.

(b) Invest in local and national infrastructures that underpin services, by:

- Involving rural women in the planning and leadership of infrastructure development to ensure it will meet women's needs.
- Investing in sustainable transport networks with an affordable cost to rural service users.
- Investing in adequate water and sanitation systems.

(c) Tackle global inequalities, by:

- Committing to fair and sustainable systems of international trade, particularly in relation to agriculture and food processing.
- Committing to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in rural areas.

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Statement submitted by National Alliance of Women's Organizations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

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Statement

The National Alliance of Women's Organizations is an umbrella group representing and supporting women's organizations and individual members based in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. With a focus on gender and Europe, the organization promotes gender equality and social justice, utilizing the internationally agreed human rights instruments for all women. The organization works alongside sister organizations as the UK Joint Committee on Women, the United Kingdom's national body representing the concerns and needs of women in the United Kingdom at the European Women's Lobby.

The priority theme of the fifty-sixth meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges, is a major challenge facing those working for the advancement of women within both national and international contexts.

The organization believes that at the present juncture it is crucial to make access to services and justice more readily available at all levels. All women in rural areas face discrimination. Rural women are often the main "outsiders" of democratic community life and local development. Their role within those rural community contexts is often linked to the family life and care, in opposition to the role of men, which is linked to public life and work. Despite the contribution that rural women make to rural development in both developing and developed countries, rural women continue to be economically and socially disadvantaged because of their limited access to economic resources and opportunities, their exclusion from planning and decision-making and their disproportionate burden of unpaid care work.

In rural areas of the United Kingdom, many elderly women and widows of farmers, and of men who have retired from urban life and jobs, experience not only relative poverty but also the "non-income" poverty of isolation, loss of dignity and barriers to participation in community life owing to cuts in transport facilities and the closing of local shops and facilities such as post offices.

In developing countries, rural women suffer extreme poverty, especially rural widows, who often suffer violations of their human rights, such as their right to inheritance and ownership or use of land, or access to credit and extension services. They therefore have no food security. According to the charity Widows for Peace through Democracy, rural widows in Africa and South Asia are often at risk of being "chased off" from their homesteads on the death of their husbands, forced into prostitution and evicted from their villages or coerced into high-risk survival strategies in the towns. Furthermore, internally displaced and refugee rural widows in conflict-afflicted countries are generally the last to be rehabilitated and resettled and require intensive support in order to rebuild their lives and those of their dependants. The international community, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Governments must address these issues and ensure that rural widows can access support services in order to protect their human rights.

The organization calls upon the United Nations system in and through all its bodies and agencies to use its technical expertise to ensure that sex-disaggregated statistics are collected to enable gender impact assessments to be made for the issue

of rural women. Information gained must be made available to Governments so that steps may be taken to mitigate detrimental impacts.

The organization further calls upon Governments, both from the North and South, to listen to the problems facing rural women and develop and apply sustainable and robust mechanisms to improve rural women's positions.

The organization calls upon States parties, the United Nations and civil society to work together towards empowering women in a rural setting, increasing prosperity and providing greater opportunities.

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by National Council of Women of the United States, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

The present statement was developed around the priority theme of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges", as it relates to rural women in farming, food production and the agricultural sector.

We urge Member States to address the pressing legal, economic, education and social needs of rural women small farmers and women employed in the agricultural sector in the United States of America and developing countries around the world.

Rural women-owned small farms contribute to local and national economies

At least 80 per cent of rural smallholder farmers worldwide are women (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 1995). Women small farmers produce as much as 50 per cent of the world's food, and agriculture contributes to countries' gross domestic product (GDP) at rates ranging from 1.1 per cent to as high as 60 per cent. Women smallholder farmers create local employment through demand for labour, processing, storage and transportation of produce. Farmers and farm labourers spend their increased incomes on goods and services in the local (rural) economies (G. Meijerink and P. Roza, 2007).

The contribution of rural women small farmers, though often unaccounted for in world economic statistics, is vital to food security for the majority of the world's population and to the local and national economies of many countries. Tipper Gore, wife of former United States Vice President Al Gore, in an address to the second International Conference on Women in Agriculture, held in Washington, D.C. in 1998, acknowledged the importance of women in agriculture as "key to the survival of mankind" when she stated that "contributions [of women small farmers] are deserving of value by society because women contribute to the economics of their households, communities and the world".

Yet, despite the fact that women farmers provide a large percentage of the world's food, at the third International Conference on Women in Agriculture, held in Madrid in 2002, it was acknowledged that little had changed for rural women farmers in the United States and their counterparts around the world. The problems persist because women small farmers are not afforded the same respect, status or benefits as men and lack the education, equipment and financial support they need to become substantial contributors in the agribusiness sector.

It is estimated that the number of the world's hungry would decrease by between 100 million and 150 million (FAO, 2010) if women farmers were able to increase their agricultural yields. Yet, Governments, businesses and societies are not meeting the needs of women farmers for education, land acquisition, credit and extension services, tools and other inputs that could increase their yields, expand their commercial opportunities and benefit their local communities and their countries' economies.

Rural women farmers get less support than men

In developing countries, discriminatory legislation, cultural traditions and attitudes towards the value of women's work contribute to a lack of equal rights and

support for women. Men often hold deeds to land that women work. Women are given plots of land on infertile soil, far from water sources. The work of rural women farmers is not accounted for in censuses and therefore is not factored into local, national and international policymakers' decisions regarding programmes for food and livestock production.

More attention is paid to crops, usually grown by men, that are slated for export, and less attention is paid to crops grown by women that are slated for local consumption, even though local produce is essential to food security and hunger eradication. Most Governments fail to promote and protect the land rights of women and support large-scale commercial farming rather than smallholder farming. Male children often have greater access than girls to education, information and resources that can help them to become better producers. In developed countries, women have difficulty securing credit for their small farm ventures and many do not possess experience or knowledge in developing and executing business plans that can build equity for credit. It is difficult for these small farmers to grow crops, negotiate distribution channels, take goods to market, take care of families, often while holding down a second job, and learn how to write business plans, or submit applications for grants and loans.

"Feminization" of agriculture has mixed benefits

An FAO document issued in 1999 showed that the proportion of women involved in agriculture and food production has steadily increased, particularly in developing countries. Collectively, in Africa, Asia, the Near East, the Pacific region, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe, women provide more than half of the labour in food production. Women are increasingly employed in food processing industries and, traditionally, are the sole preparers of food for their families. As such, they have the responsibility for the nutritional well-being of the entire family and, by extension, the community. While this participation in food production and the agricultural labour force is increasing, much of this work is arduous and low-paying, and the farming yields remain at the subsistence level. Yet, many local, national and international organizations acknowledge that women hold the key to food security.

Women's labour is a key solution to food insecurity

The International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, D.C., highlighted eight research findings in a 2000 report (available at www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/ib3.pdf) that confirmed "the central role women play as producers of food, managers of natural resources, income earners, and caretakers of household food and nutrition security". A summary of the study's findings indicated, inter alia, that:

- Agricultural productivity increases dramatically when women get the same amount of inputs men get
- Increasing women's human capital is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty
- Increasing women's assets raises investments in education and girls' health
- Women's education and status within the household contribute more than 50 per cent to the reduction of child malnutrition

- Good care practices can mitigate the effects of poverty and low maternal schooling on children's nutrition

Local food groups and national initiatives offer solutions for hunger eradication

Local food movements, such as the Wanaqua Community School Garden Program in the Bronx, New York supported by the National Council of Women of the United States, can serve as a template for hunger eradication. Globally, community food enterprises that are committed to the growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, marketing, distributing, wholesaling, retailing or serving of local and regional food can provide employment. Examples of successful community food enterprises include Panchakanya Agriculture Cooperative Limited, a women's organic fruit and vegetable cooperative in Nepal, and Ajddigue Women's Argan Cooperative in Morocco, which helps women in Morocco to extract and sell oil from native argan trees to cosmetic companies worldwide at fair trade prices (Wallace Center, 2010).

In 2009, the United States Department of Agriculture launched the "Know your farmer, know your food" programme, a national initiative that supports President Obama's administration's commitment to strengthening local and regional food systems to provide communities with healthier food choices.

Conclusions and recommendations

Supporting women smallholder farmers contributes to the strength of local economies, supports the health and nutritional needs of children, families and communities and promotes sustainable development for the life of our planet. Therefore, we urge Member States to acknowledge and support rural women smallholder farmers and local food movements, education, policy and sustainable practices by:

- Encouraging reformation of land rights policies through legislation that gives rural women access and rights to own land in their own names
- Advocating that the contributions of rural women farmers be recognized, tabulated and included in the GDPs of all countries
- Providing access to resources such as seeds, tools and other agricultural inputs
- Supporting the implementation of programmes to educate rural women farmers in sustainable farming techniques, including best practices that incorporate technology, crop rotation, irrigation, local natural fertilizers, etc.
- Educating rural women farmers on the impact of environmental degradation and how to prevent and mitigate the effects of natural environmental impacts (flood, drought, etc.) and negative farming practices (cutting down trees, monoculture, etc.)
- Gathering and cataloguing women's traditional knowledge and information on agriculture, fisheries, livestock management and natural resources management
- Establishing organizations such as food and farmers' cooperatives, local and national organizations and associations that promote rural women farmers, and including women in the decision-making within these organizations

- Supporting organizations and banks that offer microcredit to women farmers
- Providing access to markets outside of local communities so that women can sell surpluses to outside markets
- Supporting labour laws that ensure commensurate wages for women's work within the food and agricultural industries

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: International Council of Women, National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Medical Women's International Association, Soroptimist International and World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations.

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Statement submitted by Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

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Statement

While recognizing the importance of the priority theme of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges", it must be recognized that it cannot be addressed in isolation. The review theme of the session, "The financing of gender equality and the empowerment of women", also plays a pivotal role. Member States, in order to advance women's participation and recognition at a social, economic and political level, need to put in place sufficient resources and strong mechanisms to tackle gender inequalities. Therefore by eradicating gender inequalities Member States will address the major discriminations faced by rural women.

Rural women in Northern Ireland

There are 490,822 women in rural Northern Ireland out of a population of 863,872 women. Rural women therefore constitute 56.8 per cent of the women, 29 per cent of the population as a whole and 51 per cent of the population of rural areas (see Marie Crawley, "The Grass Ceiling — Audit of Women in Rural Areas of the North of Ireland", Women's Research and Development Agency (2006)). Lower earning is just one of the inequalities rural women face. While women in Northern Ireland are those most in poverty, rural women experience greater levels of deprivation.

Equality and devolution: agreed conclusions on financial gender equality and the empowerment of women — paragraph 6

In both 1999 and 2008 the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed concern that protection of women's human rights would be uneven across the devolved regions of the United Kingdom, and this has proven to be the case. There is an increasing gap in relation to a number of aspects of equality between women in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. These include public and political representation, lack of progress on the development of an integrated child-care strategy and anti-poverty measures, as well as the introduction of a new Equality Bill for England, Scotland and Wales. Government Equality Units in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are underresourced, having not been given sufficient powers to enforce strong policies and actions across departments to pursue gender mainstreaming and to ensure increased women's participation in the social, economic and political areas. An example is, as part of the Government's drive to cut costs, the Women's National Commission, set up in 1969 as the national, independent organization to present the views of women to Government, as an advisory non-departmental public body was abolished, leaving a gap in the coordination of policy, information and cooperation on issues across the United Kingdom at national and international levels.

Decision-making and public life: agreed conclusions on financing gender equality and the empowerment of women — paragraph 9

We would strongly argue that the limited progress in Northern Ireland in relation to equality for women is linked to underrepresentation in decision-making. In the current Legislative Assembly in Northern Ireland only 15 out of 108 members

are women. Only 22 per cent of councillors in local government are women and fewer than 34 per cent of members of public bodies are women (these bodies are responsible for significant aspects of public administration in Northern Ireland, including health and social care, education and equality). Despite pressure from international bodies and measures set out in the Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland, there has been a lack of concrete measures to address this underrepresentation. Even where measures have been introduced, such as the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act, this has not been used.

The rural development programme worth approximately £100 million in 2008 set up seven local action groups that comprised local elected representatives and civic society. The responsibility for the delivery of the six measures saw only two of the local action groups manage to ensure that 40 per cent of the group was female. One group of 22 members had only 7 female members (see "Policy Update", Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, Summer 2008).

Investing in women and girls: agreed conclusions on financial gender equality and the empowerment of women — paragraph 11

In the recent economic downturn, like most women at an international and European level, women in Northern Ireland are experiencing high unemployment. In 2010 research of the Institute for Public Policy Research on youth unemployment and the recession found that among 16- to 24-year-olds unemployment is highest for those with no qualifications. Just 7 per cent of women in Northern Ireland are self-employed and only 2.4 per cent are entrepreneurs. Northern Ireland's figure for women's entrepreneurial activity is far below that of the European Union. Just one in eight board members of companies listed in the Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 index is a woman; at the current rate of change it will take over 70 years to achieve improvement.

Importance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs): agreed conclusions on financial gender equality and the empowerment of women — paragraph 15

It is estimated that there are over 800 women's groups and organizations in Northern Ireland, the strength of their diversity is their representation of the diversity of women. During this period of financial crisis there is a weakness in the infrastructure at global, European and national levels to provide sufficient resources for community involvement, support and commitment to active citizenship. The women's sector in Northern Ireland was in the past the very place where this was nurtured and developed during the Northern Ireland 40-year conflict. There needs to be building of social capital that will contribute to positive and permanent change. At present through financial constraints the women's sector is struggling to maintain its contribution to the development of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

An example of good practice to increase women's participation in decision-making was a project identified in 2000 and supported by the European Commission, the Fermanagh Women's Network in Northern Ireland. It set out to improve the participation of women's groups in the decision-making process in rural areas. Comprising only four local women's groups in the county, and run by a voluntary management committee, the network showed potential for growth and expansion and received local and regional funding. With paid staff organizing and

developing further initiatives, the number of women's groups in the county has grown from 5 to 26 (see *Women Active in Rural Development*, European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture (2000)). Unfortunately, the project no longer has resources to provide the infrastructure and to maintain its networks.

Political commitment and budgetary resources: agreed conclusions on financial gender equality and the empowerment of women — paragraph 16

There was little or no gender impact assessment in the decisions made about the United Kingdom Emergency Budget and Comprehensive Spending Review or the Northern Ireland Budget. Women's rights and entitlements are being stripped away and an outdated "male breadwinner — dependent female carer" perspective is being imposed. The principle of gendering needs to be applied to the assessment of the recession, public spending measures, economic recovery measures and specific stimulus packages; otherwise gender inequality will be aggravated. All data gathering and analysis must be gendered to understand the different impacts on women and men (see Bronagh Hinds (Democrashe), "The Northern Ireland Economy — Women on the Edge? A comprehensive analysis of the impact on the financial crisis", Women's Resource and Development Agency (2011)).

There is no cohesive approach to research and statistics relating to women in agriculture in Northern Ireland, which makes it difficult to comprehend fully their positive contribution to the economy and stabilized rural communities. Some positive research carried out in 2002 indicated that of the regular farming activities Northern Ireland women reported, women do play a central role in ensuring the sustainability of agriculture through their on- and off-farm work (see S. Shortall, "Women in the Field: Women, Farming and Organizations", *Gender, Work and Organization*, vol. 8, issue 2). Women also play a key role in developmental work in rural areas. Of the women sampled in the report:

- 79 per cent were feeding farm labour
- 42 per cent were doing farm collections and deliveries
- 69 per cent were dealing with callers and ordering supplies
- 80 per cent were doing farm accounts and form filling
- 65 per cent were doing farming work
- 51 per cent reported having some form of off-farm employment.

A key issue for rural farming women is that they are not formally recognized in the Northern Ireland Agriculture Census, as the reporting system only allows for one principle partner. That means that in the last census 35 per cent of women who were working more than 30 hours a week on their farms were classified as "spouses of farmers" (see S. Shortfall and R. Kelly, "Gender Proofing Cap Reforms", Rural Community Network (2001)).

Conclusion

To address the inequalities faced by rural women the agreed conclusions on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women need to be fully implemented, including the following recommendations:

- **Gender budgeting must be mainstreamed into the development of all government policies.**
- **Baselines, timelines and outcomes for addressing gender inequalities should be included in all government financial policies and actions.**
- **Recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the development of national machineries to increase women's and girls' empowerment must be implemented within a given timescale.**
- **Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the subsequent resolutions 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009) should be fully implemented in countries emerging from conflict with the appropriate resources and positive actions required.**
- **There should be recognition of empowerment of women and girls during times of economic downturn, which has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth, and adequate resources should be provided and stereotypical attitudes of the roles of women and men eradicated.**
- **All government policies need to be rural-proofed and rural gender-proofed.**
- **Better gender awareness and gender-disaggregated information on rural women are needed.**
- **Recognition through evidence of rural farming women and evidence of their contribution to the social, and political aspects of rural life is needed.**

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Statement submitted by Pax Romana, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

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Statement

Introduction

As States struggle with violence, poverty and unemployment, education is being acknowledged as a successful and sustainable solution for many social ills. Nevertheless, the global economic and financial crisis has made an impact on Governments everywhere. Most importantly, this crisis has demonstrated that women are a particularly vulnerable group. More than ever, Governments are being challenged to prove their commitment to the development of women and girls through their support of education, and now, more than ever, the world needs strong coordination to empower women and girls as a way to alleviate the economic crisis. With regard to the implementation of internationally agreed goals and commitments regarding education, Pax Romana believes that Governments must carry out the important task of ensuring that these goals actually influence domestic policy.

Policy

The multifaceted benefits of an education have been acknowledged by Member States. That is a commendable initial step. It is time to turn words into action, especially in regard to women and girls. We call on Member States to place education as a higher priority in their budgets than they currently do. It is unfair to create expectations and demand high results of schooling without providing schools with the tools to succeed in their work. Also, when girls are not allowed to fully enjoy their right to an education, they are prevented from becoming part of the solution to many social problems.

It is the unfortunate reality of many States caught in the centre of violence and war that the atmosphere is often not safe or conducive to learning. Young women and girls are especially susceptible to falling victim to violence in conflict zones. To curb the risk of losing students to a culture of violence, steps must be taken to make schools safe for children to attend. A commitment must be made to the young people who have not had a role in creating the dangerous situations in their countries.

The United Nations development agenda refers to the needs of women and girls regarding education, employment and many other issues. This extends into the general wage gap between men and women. The reality is that female-dominated professions are paid less than traditionally male-dominated professions. The teaching profession is generally considered female-dominated, but the average salary of a teacher does not come close to compensating the amount of time involved in preparations, teaching and evaluations. The salaries and benefits of educators are not only insufficient but also, because many Governments are cutting spending, are constantly being challenged. There should be a commitment to acknowledging the value of teachers through salary increases and a greater respect for their work.

Two thirds of the world's uneducated children are girls. This reality of young women and the obstacles they face before even entering a classroom must be addressed to ensure that the goal of education for all is truly upheld. Girls and women everywhere must be provided with equal access to education and a safe learning environment.

Schools

Schools must aim for the accommodation and success of all students, regardless of gender. Moreover, it is critical that schools be provided the resources necessary to make this opportunity for educational equality a reality.

Those pursuing a career in education must be better prepared for the evolving classroom. Teacher education programmes should offer courses that allow potential teachers to understand how to serve all of their students in the best manner possible, especially young women and girls. If teachers take courses that provide them with concrete methods of bringing gender equality to classrooms, the long-term benefits for students, classrooms, schools and societies are immeasurable.

It seems that in more and more countries, the education field has been placed behind many other professions in terms of wages. Owing to the fact that teachers earn their wages by producing educated students and not tangible money-making products, their work is not compensated in a way that matches teachers' value to society. Teachers must be treated better by their schools and Governments because they are shaping the future generation of women and men.

Recommendations

In conclusion, Pax Romana makes the recommendations set out below.

The focus of educating women and girls must not fall victim to the economic crisis. Instead of cutting spending on education, this is the opportune moment to invest more in the education of women and girls. Education has become politicized by many Governments, and priority has not been put on students. Long-term vision rather than immediate results will help to eradicate poverty and encourage the realization of many other goals. Without the proper funding directed towards the educational needs of women and girls, the cycles of poverty and unemployment will claim more victims.

Since the commitment was made in 2000 to the Millennium Development Goals, the world has yet to see major improvement in many of the priorities agreed upon by Member States. While there are States that have achieved some goals, there remain many areas that still have a major need for change but have little time remaining to achieve all goals by 2015. We therefore implore Member States to concentrate on the education of women and girls because of the effect this achievement would have on realizing many of the other goals. Through this endeavour, improvements would be seen across many different areas of need.

In places where discrimination against women and girls is an issue, Governments should work harder to ensure that nobody is denied her right to an education. Domestic laws that seek to empower women and girls in terms of education must be reinforced through legislation and action on the part of Government. It is necessary to promote the empowerment of women and girls in order for the benefits of education to have their full effect.

Countries should ensure that women and girls have a voice in national debates, especially in the development of educational policies. Participating in this process allows women and girls to take ownership of their future. The establishment of gender-balanced national youth councils that are independent from the Government would ensure that the voice of even the most vulnerable group is heard.

Every community is unique and has needs specific to its population and market. When considering programmes and initiatives to offer schools and communities, we ask that goals be shaped to fit the needs of each population. Through surveys of local businesses, community meetings and available data, it can be determined what would best aid the women and girls of specific localities.

The 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All states: "Partnerships between governments, NGOs, communities and families can help ensure the provision of good care and education for children, especially for those most disadvantaged, through activities centred on the child, focused on the family, based within the community and supported by national, multi-sectoral policies and adequate resources" (available from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf). A true commitment to the education of young women and girls by Governments can be demonstrated by following through on this statement.

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Statement submitted by Plan International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

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Statement

The necessity of eliminating harmful practices and increasing the role of men and boys in order to achieve the empowerment of rural women and girls

This year's priority theme for the Commission on the Status of Women is the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges. Plan International has worked to secure child rights across thousands of rural societies, currently in 66 countries, for the past 75 years. This programme experience, supported by the findings from five annual reports from the series entitled "Because I am a girl: the state of the world's girls" provides the organization with an in-depth insight into the scale of disempowerment and lack of agency among women and girls in rural communities, along with the knowledge and experience of how to best address this and increase their empowerment and role in the development of themselves and of the local societies and global community in which they live. Our research and programme experience has consistently demonstrated that education is central to the empowerment of rural women and girls.

Girls and boys throughout the world are subjected to many violent and discriminatory practices. Any form of violence against children, whether physical, psychological or emotional, is a violation of their right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence and a fundamental breach of their dignity and integrity; it affects their chances of achieving a quality education and as such of reaching their full potential. Harmful practices are often performed in the name of tradition and are sometimes sanctioned by customary laws. This is particularly the case in rural locations where the rule of law is less likely to reach and local forces are more powerful. Early and forced marriage is one such practice, embedded in many cultures and traditions, which is experienced by 10 million girls a year.

The age at which girls marry among rural indigenous people tends to be lower than in urbanized areas. In Guatemala, for example, research indicates that indigenous Mayan girls experience higher rates of early marriage, coinciding with their spending fewer years in school. According to a working paper by the Population Council, by the age of 18, almost 40 per cent of Mayan females in Guatemala are married, which is nearly twice the rate of other females of the same age.

This practice keeps girls in poverty. When Plan Egypt carried out a baseline study in four rural communities, they found that early marriage or marriage of school-aged girls was considered the main barrier to achieving Goals 2 and 3 of the Millennium Development Goals, on universal primary education and gender equality, for girls and boys in rural communities.

Ending early and enforced marriage will empower rural women and girls. Getting and keeping girls in school may be one of the best ways to foster later, consensual marriage, while also contributing to delayed sexual initiation, lower rates of HIV and AIDS, reduced maternal mortality and other morbidities, and greater gender equality. One study in rural Bangladesh by the University of London highlighted the fact that, when marriage is delayed, girls are much more likely to stay in school for longer and be literate.

Call to action

The organization recommends that Member States:

- Invest in mechanisms to prevent early and forced marriage and offer protection and support services for girls at risk, including help for families, psychosocial support, child protection resources and legal assistance. Work with partner Governments to develop in-country support networks for women and girls who seek to escape from early or forced marriages.
- Strengthen the enforcement of birth registration, implement laws governing the minimum age for marriage and incorporate measures to prevent early and forced marriage into other Government sector initiatives, such as health, education, employment and domestic wealth creation. In tandem, strengthen laws compelling families to keep boys and girls in school and enforcing a compulsory education age and build the capacity of schools to report cases of marriage before the legal age.
- Seek accountability for the provision of compulsory, free education for girls. At the community level, build an understanding and acceptance of girls' rights among caregivers.
- Fund and publicize existing good practice by civil society and women's organizations on early and forced marriage and the promotion of girls' voices in advocacy for their rights and the building of girl-friendly governance and accountability mechanisms.
- Invest in strengthening the evidence on the relationship between early and forced marriage and girls' education and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the collection of age- and sex-disaggregated data. In particular, fund research into the role of education in preventing or delaying early and forced marriage.

Role of men and boys in improving the lives of women and girls in rural settings

Over 60 per cent of children recently interviewed in India agreed that if resources are scarce it is better to educate a boy instead of a girl. This is one example of how gender inequality starts at an early age and how education is the place where it is best addressed.

In many rural societies and institutions it is men who still control the levers of power, so without support from them we will not achieve equality. History shows us that the legislation that has helped women's empowerment has in fact been largely put in place by male legislators.

Gender equality cannot be achieved without far better participation from men and boys, particularly the fathers, brothers and husbands in girls' and women's lives. Girls have a right to better gender equality, but that does not mean they should shoulder the burden of achieving it alone. This focus on men and boys is the theme of the organization's 2012 report on the state of the world's girls, entitled "So, what about boys?".

Two examples of how men have helped women and girls in rural settings to achieve the empowerment and rights they deserve are as follows:

- Seiku Soya, a 65-year-old farmer from Guinea, was appalled when he learned about the dangers of female genital cutting. He refused to let his nine daughters go through the local initiation ceremony. He was ostracized for several years by his community and even forced to dig his own well for his family. Seiku's brave stance was eventually vindicated when the rest of the village rejected cutting after a local health campaign.
- Egyptian Imam El Sheikh Saad is deputy chairman of El Mandara Community Development Association, the local partner of Plan Egypt in the village of El Mandara. His beliefs changed after meeting with doctors and social workers at a Plan workshop on harmful traditional practices. He is now a strong campaigner against the dangers of early marriage and female genital mutilation, including for his own 6-year-old daughter. A number of imams are now taking such a stance.

Action plan to increase role of men and boys: educate, campaign, legislate

The organization recommends that Member States:

- Promote preschool education equality between girls and boys and involve parents.
- Transform school curricula to challenge stereotypes.
- Support girls' and boys' participation in the creation of policies to improve sex education.
- Make schools safe for girls and boys.
- Pass laws that enable both parents to take an active part in raising their children.
- Enforce legislation to end violence against women and girls.
- Legislate for equal opportunities.

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Statement

Of the approximately 3.4 billion women in the world, more than 500 million are poor rural women. Of those poor rural women, about 4.2 million live in the United States of America.

Some of the poor rural women in the United States work on small farms or as farmworkers for corporate farmers. Their income is increasingly from non-farm sources. However, employers are increasingly closing plants and laying people off during the great recession. A disproportionate number of families in persistently poor rural areas in the United States are people of colour or from otherwise historically oppressed groups. New economic options are comparatively limited because the Internet is not widely available. Access to health and mental health care is often inadequate because of distance to providers. Public transportation is rarely available. Rural women are especially vulnerable to domestic violence because of their economic and social status and comparative isolation. Educational attainment among rural women is lower than among the general population. As in developing countries, self-employment and microenterprise appear to provide a path to greater self-sufficiency.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognizes the extent of poverty in the developing world and in poverty-stricken areas in developed countries. It states that poverty among women is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources, including credit, land ownership and inheritance, and to education and support services as well as their minimal participation in the decision-making process. Poverty can also force women into situations in which they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

It also notes the disproportionate burdens that rural women bear. Because of their distance from centres of power, media, money and influence, the concerns of rural women are often not included on the agendas of decision-making bodies. The priority theme of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is a positive step towards recognizing the concerns of poor rural women worldwide.

In order to fulfil the potential of the theme and to meet the Commission's recommendation that women be represented in the decision-making bodies that affect them, it is important that more poor rural women, including women from poverty-stricken areas in developed countries, be present at the fifty-sixth session and at future sessions. The professional and academic women who predominate at meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women perform important work as allies of the poor. But the empowerment of poor rural women will be realized more fully when they have a seat at the table. Their role in poverty and hunger eradication will be enhanced. Their recommendations for development and current challenges will be heard. They are leaders in their communities and deserve the same chance as others to meet with peers from around the world, share experiences and strategies and advocate for themselves and the causes they believe in. We recommend that Member States, voluntary groups and non-governmental organizations working with the United Nations make this possible by giving financial support to poor rural women from their countries so that they may participate in sessions of the Commission.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: International Public Policy Institute and Niger Delta Women's Movement for Peace and Development.

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Statement submitted by Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-61991 (E) 120112

Please recycle

Statement

Introduction

During the present social crisis triggered by economic and environmental crises, our world is going through a transition. The direct negative impact of this crisis is particularly felt by women, who have been disproportionately affected.

All around the world, women are engaged at all levels of the economy — from providing basic necessities for their families (food, water, fuel and health care) to building communities and running businesses. They are forest stewards, farmers, land managers, community leaders, researchers, political leaders, technology designers and entrepreneurs.

Women reinvest a much higher portion of their earnings in their communities and make important investments. Yet, due to sociocultural gender inequality, women's skills and contributions often remain unrecognized. By recognizing and strengthening women's roles in both formal and informal economic activities, women are empowered.

On the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October 2011), the Secretary-General said that women were critical to addressing hunger, malnutrition and poverty and contributing to food security and economic growth but lacked equal access to opportunities and resources. Women cannot be empowered unless we address not only economic, social, cultural and environmental issues but also gender discrimination.

Rural women and poverty

It is increasingly recognized that poverty is heavily concentrated in rural areas (75 per cent of the world's working poor live in rural areas) and that substantial progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and other international development goals depends heavily on improving agricultural and rural development. According to the International Labour Organization, 60 per cent of the working poor are women. Working poverty shares many of the characteristics of extreme poverty. The rural poor are predominantly smallholder farmers (particularly in sub-Saharan Africa) or agricultural wage labourers (particularly in South Asia).

Rural women are the backbone of agriculture throughout much of the developing world. They produce half of the world's food, and in some developing countries, they produce as much as 80 per cent of the food. On a global scale, women make up a substantial portion of the agricultural workforce. While it is estimated that women's agricultural work produces 35 to 45 per cent of gross domestic product in developing countries, rural women have little access to land ownership.

Small farmers and food security

The Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, said that each year, up to 30 million hectares of farmland were lost to environmental degradation, conversion to industrial use or urbanization — a trend made worse by increased competition between food and energy crops and speculation on farmland by private investors. He also cautioned that smallholder farmers faced the risk of exploitation under contract farming arrangements with processing or marketing

companies and recommended mechanisms that could ensure that such agreements were fairer. The world was witnessing a situation in which pressures on land and water were increasing at an unprecedented speed, with dramatic consequences for millions of farmers, fishers and indigenous peoples and their right to food (A/65/281).

The world's largest agribusiness companies are pouring billions of dollars into and claiming patents on what are claimed to be "climate-ready crops". Far from helping farmers adjust to a warming world — something peasant farmers already know how to manage — these crops will allow industrial agriculture to expand plantation monocultures into lands currently cultivated by poor peasant farmers. This approach is not a solution to growing hunger but only feeds corporate greed.

According to the Special Rapporteur, in order to allow small farmers to climb up the value chain, we need to encourage them to develop cooperatives that can process, package and market the food they produce. In order for this to happen, farmers must have access to local markets in order to ensure that they are not excessively dependent on one commodity buyer who has access to the global market and essentially acts as a gatekeeper for access to the high-value countries of the North.

Jamaican farmers have shown success in growing vegetables in greenhouses in the past several years. This means that an environmentally vulnerable country which had previously imported more than half its food is now in a position to export food. This success story can be replicated in other countries, enabling them to become food-secure.

Through organic food production from natural seeds, fish production by small fishers, traditional aquaculture and riverine and lake fishing, each nation could become self-sufficient. The land should be owned by small farmers, water bodies should be owned by small fishers and forests should be owned by tribal and indigenous peoples.

Economic globalization and rural women

The free movement of capital for making profit by a few at the expense of the vast majority who do not have the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, education and health care must be revisited so that greater justice can be provided to all stakeholders. All Governments need to make food sovereignty and environmental protection a priority.

The food supply is currently being controlled by the rich multinational corporations. In the name of profit, those corporations introduce high-yielding hybrid seeds, genetically engineered cultivation and pesticides, which not only make food poisonous but also lead farmers into debt. India alone has reported thousands of suicides among farmers.

Nations and communities have not only lost their food sovereignty to industrialization and high-technology cultivation by the multinational corporations but have also displaced and/or destroyed the culture of a vast majority of small farmers and indigenous peoples.

Impact of geo-engineering on rural women

In this period of unprecedented technological research and development, geo-engineering is taking precedence as a solution to the climate crisis. Geo-engineering is the deliberate manipulation of Earth systems to alter the climate, including high-risk technologies, such as blasting particles into the stratosphere to mimic volcanic eruptions (to block sunlight) and "fertilizing" oceans to grow plankton blooms for carbon sequestration.

The impact of such climate manipulation on agriculture would be particularly felt by peasants in the South, and tinkering with the oceans could destroy the livelihoods of thousands in the small-scale fishing community. The social and environmental impact of geo-engineering needs to be assessed before it causes irreversible damage to the planet and its inhabitants, especially women and children.

Policy and rural women

Providing women with access to reproductive health education and services helps empower women and can address some of the concerns associated with an expanding global population. We need to ensure profound policy and legislative changes that are inclusive. The Committee on World Food Security acknowledged that women farmers received only 5 per cent of agricultural extension services worldwide. There is a need to promote women's awareness and participation in Government and business leadership to capitalize on their intuition and skills for the common good. The right to information should be made accessible to women in rural areas.

In many countries women are the poorest of the poor. If social support programmes reach women directly, the entire family benefits. We strongly support the Social Protection Floor Initiative as a policy which ensures that all family members are adequately cared for and leads to a just future in which girls, boys, women and men all have the time and opportunities to learn and contribute.

Recommendations for the United Nations and Member States

- Ensure a universal social protection floor to the 631 million least privileged people living below $1.25 a day. Ensure that the cash benefits reach women directly.
- Governments need to encourage small farmers and the use of traditional seeds and organic cultivation as a means to achieve food security and sustainability.
- Criminalize land grabbing and regulate the use of small farmers' lands by agribusiness companies for "climate-ready crops".
- Secure women's property rights and control over natural resources and promote rural women farmers' cooperatives and access to market the food they produce for sustainable food security.
- Food sovereignty and regulation in food prices should be among the national priorities of all.

Conclusion

In the words of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Helen Clark, "We have a collective responsibility towards the least privileged among us today and in the future around the world — and a moral imperative to ensure that the present is not the enemy of the future".

Note: Statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Carmelite NGO, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and VIVAT International.

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Statement submitted by Sociologists for Women in Society, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-61997 (E) 291211

Please recycle

Statement

Sociologists for Women in Society is a non-profit scientific and educational organization of sociologists dedicated to improving women's lives and creating feminist social change. We gained consultative status with the Economic and Social Council in 1999 following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Rural women make up a significant portion of the world's low-income population and we applaud the attention paid to them and their role in development by the Commission on the Status of Women. In preparation for its fifty-sixth session, we convened a panel in August 2011 on rural women, poverty, hunger and development: feminist sociological insight. Several expert sociologists, including Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Mangala Subramaniam, Yordanos Tiruneh and Catherine Meola, offered ideas based on their extensive research to assist the Commission in its focus on rural women's role in development. The panellists emphasized the following points for Member States to consider:

Put women at the centre of development as active agents of social transformation. Development is not simply growth in gross domestic product. Economic growth alone does not alleviate poverty. A better approach to development is to conceptualize it as "planned social transformation" that puts women at the centre. Women are not passive recipients of development but are active agents of social transformation. For successful development, women and others at the foundation of society must be included in the development planning process. Development is most sustainable when demand is generated from within, by the intended recipients, the best source to define priorities. In assessing development efforts, women's long hours of reproductive labour, as they feed and care for their families, must be viewed as a critical part of community development rather than women's private responsibility.

Community grass-roots groups are the most effective way to involve women in planned social transformation. Community grass-roots groups mobilize and empower rural women, giving them the confidence and skills to engage in the political process. They create solidarity among women and empower them to speak up to the authorities. Community grass-roots groups convey critical information to rural women and allow local female leaders to emerge. Women organized into community grass-roots groups are effective advocates for development. Despite their proven success, there are few women's community grass-roots groups in rural areas. A significant increase in women's community grass-roots groups can empower rural women and accelerate social transformation.

Literacy is the most significant challenge confronting rural women. Women's low educational achievement contributes to the problem of poverty. Adult literacy is much lower for rural women than for urban women. Even among rural women, literacy varies dramatically along class, caste, ethnic and religious lines. For instance, in the Indian State of Karnataka, the national literacy rate for women is relatively high. But when those rates are disaggregated by caste at the district level, literacy rates for rural low-caste women are much lower than the national rates. These differences have implications for access to resources and the degree of power exercised within the family and community. Poorly educated women have limited access to resources, such as land, markets and credit. They are vulnerable to violence, trafficking and HIV infection, a "feminine epidemic" in many areas. Low

enrolment of rural girls in school perpetuates poverty and vulnerability in the next generation.

Literacy projects bring rural women together and foster community grass-roots groups. When rural women acquire literacy, they have new opportunities for paid employment and the means to contribute more effectively to their family circumstances. Through adult literacy projects, rural women learn vital information about HIV that empowers them to protect themselves against infection. Literacy projects bring women together and give them the confidence to organize against violence. Women's community grass-roots groups created through literacy projects provide the means for women to support one another as they address community and family needs. Scheduling for adult literacy projects should take place in consultation with women's community grass-roots groups in order to allow rural women to balance their wage work, housework and literacy classes.

Educated rural women can provide community grass-roots groups with the leadership needed for community transformation. Educated women empowered by community grass-roots groups are more likely to fill leadership roles and work for community improvement rather than merely individual advancement. Educated women organized into community grass-roots groups can press for the enforcement of laws protecting women such as those against domestic violence and early marriage. They can advocate for girls' education, adult literacy classes, access to clean water, improved sanitation and greater access to primary health care. Educated rural women leaders can transform women's and girls' lives at the grass-roots level and bring about effective community social transformation.

Sociologists for Women in Society calls upon the States Members of the United Nations to intensify the focus of development efforts on literacy projects, community grass-roots groups and rural women's leadership. We urge policymakers to pay special attention to differences among women by class, caste, ethnicity and religion and to develop programmes targeting specific groups of women. Such targeted development efforts will empower all categories of rural women and produce successful, long-lasting social transformation.

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Statement submitted by St. Joan's International Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-62003 (E) 271211

Please recycle

Statement

Our organization is predominantly but not exclusively Catholic. We have felt, since our founding 100 years ago, a disappointment that some types of the mistreatment and suffering of women are caused by our Church. Because the Catholic Church is so large and influential, this oppression has spread beyond Catholicism and harms women of many faiths worldwide.

The Church is ruled by males who determine church doctrine, church policies, interpretation of scripture, history and traditions. Women's voices and perceptions are not heard. Male-only images of God serve to empower and entitle human men and to disempower and devalue needs expressed by women. These needs include the need to raise children in a gentle, loving environment where their welfare and well-being are nurtured, but they have taken a backseat to male priorities and masculine interpretations of reality. War, violence and grasping for power often have their roots in childhood trauma. Without the implementation of women's values, these traumas will continue to be passed on from generation to generation.

For Catholic women, the reality is that they are repressed by teachings that determine their adult fate. These teachings are favourable to the comfort and development of men, but subordinate women's less self-centred needs and voices. This is true in education, employment, politics, family life and many other areas. Even women's needs for physical safety and respect within the family are not supported by the teachings or active policies of most religious leaders.

We belong to a Church which restricts leadership to men chosen for their agreement with the hierarchy and which silences educated and responsible diversity of opinion in the pulpit, in the universities and in the media — for laymen and even more so for women. We work to make women's voices heard within and also outside of the Roman Catholic Church. In doing so we feel that the values we support are our truly religious values, and not only ours but also those of women of all religions worldwide.

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Statement submitted by Stichting Rutgers WPF, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

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Please recycle

Statement

Pakistan ranks as one of the poorest and most populous countries in the world, with an estimated population of 180 million. The cycle of poverty is exacerbated by high rates of illiteracy, unemployment and ill health, particularly among women and adolescents. Pakistan is a conservative and patriarchal society where women and girls — 48 per cent of the population (see www.mopw.gov.pk/PopulationDynamicsByProvince.aspx) — are generally low in the hierarchy of power, and their rights to education, health care and proper nutrition are largely denied. Thus, owing to a lack of awareness on the part of both rights-holders and duty bearers, access to sexual and reproductive health information remains limited. This is illustrated by the common occurrence of early marriages, early pregnancies, induced abortions and high maternal and infant mortality ratios. In addition, the absence of women-friendly policies and legislation and the poor implementation of existing laws leads to increased violence and low protection of women and adolescent girls, especially with regard to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Similarly, complex sociocultural beliefs and practices prevent women from participating in economic activities and being financially independent.

Empowerment of women is an extremely complex, multidimensional and emerging concept within the sphere of development. Empowerment appears to be context-specific and has multiple determinants that include economic, political, social, cultural, religious, personal, psychological and emotional elements. According to "Women's empowerment in Pakistan, a scoping study" by the Gender Equity Program of Aurat Foundation, empowerment is believed to be the road to women's own equality, rights and fulfilment, while the instrumental view regards women's empowerment as the means to a better family, economy, society and nation.

The women of Pakistan are not an invisible group. It is a general perception that the women of Pakistan are confined to their houses, but this is not the case, particularly in the urban parts of the country, where more women are prominent in various fields. The President of Pakistan has appointed the first female Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan. Two women doctors of the Pakistan Army have also risen to the rank of Major General.

There remains, however, a noticeable difference between the lives of women in urban and in rural areas. Rural women account for the majority of the female population of Pakistan, but they lack adequate empowerment. While most women in urban centres can now attain an education ranging from basic to master's level, women in rural areas are still struggling to reach the secondary level of education. They are also victims of inhumane customs and laws, such as karo kari (honour killing) and marriage to the Koran to keep property from being transferred outside the family. They are subjected to discrimination on the basis of their gender, and they also suffer from financial discrimination and are considered an economic burden.

The empowerment of rural women will see them as agents of social and economic change in society.

The foremost condition of women's empowerment is education. It is vital to understand that, for sustainable development, improving the situation of adolescent girls is both a goal in itself as well as an instrument in reaching other goals.

particularly those of gender equality, child mortality, maternal health and HIV/AIDS. Adolescent girls need to be taught about their social and reproductive health and rights, which is the key to discouraging inhumane practices in society, such as sexual and gender-based violence. According to "Age of marriage: a position paper" by Mumtaz, Waraich and Imam, there is a proven positive correlation between education, age of marriage and reproductive health behaviour. Women with higher education enter marriage later, have their first conception later and are 10 times less likely to start early childbearing than women with secondary education. When women are educated, their use of contraceptives increases and their knowledge of HIV/AIDS and its prevention is higher. Education will bring about social empowerment of women.

The involvement of women in the political process, whether as voters, political party workers or political candidates will be a significant step towards the social empowerment of women. Currently in Pakistan, 33 per cent of the seats in all local legislative bodies and 17 per cent of the seats in the constituent assembly at the national level are reserved for women. Although these are welcome initiatives, much still needs to be done to bring about political empowerment. Awareness-raising is needed to inform women of their political rights and the significance of participating in the electoral process. Training in capacity-building has to be conducted for women candidates who want to run for office.

The other significant effort towards women's empowerment is through economic empowerment. A major obstacle is the infringement of a woman's right to own land. Owing to cultural practices, generally land is owned by men or, where the woman is the legal owner, the actual control of the land is retained by her male relative. Enforcing women's land and property rights, with the effective ownership and control of their land, will ensure that women's voices within the household and at the community level will carry weight.

Women in rural areas perform a number of functions outside of the household, including participating in agricultural operations such as harvesting, threshing and looking after farm animals. Although female participation in such activities is very significant, it has never been accounted for in terms of economic benefits. Where remuneration is given for these activities, it is generally paid to a male member of the family.

In other sectors of paid employment, women face adverse working conditions ranging from harassment to being paid less for the same job as their male counterparts. Frequently, women are not registered as employees and cannot benefit from labour laws. Women who are home-based workers are frequently exploited because of their lack of knowledge of the market and are paid very poorly for their hard work.

It is encouraging to note that an enabling policy environment has been created by the Government of Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan has introduced a poverty alleviation programme, "Benazir Income Support Programme". This programme focuses on the women of poor families, who are given cash assistance on a monthly basis. This is direct disbursement of assistance to poor women at their doorsteps. The primary objective is to enhance women's participation and establish their authority in decision-making at home, to manage resources and be self-reliant.

Another objective is to assist women in breaking the cycle of poverty through the provision of interest-free financial assistance. This step would enable selected families to initiate businesses and pursue entrepreneurship; it is designed to promote self-employment among women beneficiaries to improve their livelihood.

A secondary objective of the programme is to register women with the National Database and Registration Authority and provide them with national identity cards. Further avenues of empowerment are opened to those who possess national identity cards, such as microfinance facilities and the ability to vote in the political process.

The low socio-economic status of women means that they have limited access to health-care services. The availability, accessibility and quality of basic health services are of a poor standard in rural areas. This is compounded by the fact that health matters receive less than 1 per cent of gross domestic product, according to "Women's empowerment in Pakistan". The lack of female doctors, paired with the limited mobility of women, also restricts women's access to health-care services. This in turn has a severe impact on the maternal mortality ratio, which is 260 deaths per 100,000 live births, and infant mortality ratio, which is 89 deaths per 1,000 live births, according to the United Nations Population Fund report "The state of the world's midwifery 2011".

Pakistan is a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and its obligations under the Platform for Action include empowerment of women. The current situation, as reflected above, requires that Pakistan adopt a number of pro-women policies to empower rural women and fulfil its obligations under the Platform for Action.

Pakistan also adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000. In order to meet the Millennium Development Goals, greater emphasis on economic empowerment is essential through extensive policies that help poor people break the cycle of poverty. Similarly, health-care services have to be improved to enhance the sexual and reproductive health of rural women.

Investment in education must be a main priority in Pakistan. Furthermore, contextualized comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive health education must be part of the national education curriculum, which would lead to empowered adolescent girls. This in turn will ensure the fulfilment of the obligation of Pakistan under the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and enormous progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 2.

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Statement submitted by Women in Law and Development in Africa, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-62117 (E) 161211 040112

Please recycle

Statement

Women in Law and Development in Africa, a pan-African women's rights network with members in the following countries: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, wishes to congratulate the Commission on the Status of Women on having chosen as the theme of its fifty-sixth session the topic: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges".

Although rural African women do the most work within families, play a vital role in the development of agriculture and livestock production and manage household and community food security more efficiently, their economic and social status is subject to a number of constraints that minimize the impact of their efforts on poverty and hunger eradication, thereby diminishing African populations' sustainable development prospects.

Despite the commitments made by States under article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, article 19 of the Protocol to the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, rural women still face inequality and discrimination in participating in rural development and sharing in its benefits, as well as in exercising their rights.

Some of this discrimination and inequality in women's family life takes the form of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, degrading and humiliating widowhood practices, levirate and repudiation. In their professional life, inequalities persist in access to resources such as land, credit, agricultural inputs and technology and in access to the market. More so than men, the vast majority of rural women are not even aware of their rights and are therefore unable to demand them. Such inequality and discrimination between the sexes are factors that create the most insidious obstacles to poverty reduction and women's empowerment.

Women in Law and Development in Africa,

Considering, therefore, that rural development requires that account be taken of the barriers and inequalities faced by women, including lack of information and knowledge about their political, social and economic rights and about ways and means of exercising them and demanding them when they are infringed,

Considering that despite the progress made, there are still a number of shortcomings in the African countries, notably a phenomenon of political avoidance of the issue and a gap between the policies adopted in relation to gender and women's empowerment and their effective implementation, a lack of gender-disaggregated data to guide policies and actions, limited capacity for coordinating gender equality and women's empowerment and too little accountability and commitment to action on questions of gender equality and women's empowerment,

Encouraged by the results of the programmes that our network has put in place for rural women and women farmers, particularly in different African countries, and their impact on the ability of rural women to fight against violence and other rights violations within the family and to gain access to resources and to community, economic and political decision-making bodies,

Considering that it is imperative, in the interest of sustainable development, that priority be given to actions that address the structural causes of poverty in order to change the relations of inequality between men and women and enhance the social, legal, political and economic status of rural women,

Urges the delegations present at the fifty-sixth session of the Commission to ensure that the agreed conclusions recommend to States and development partners that they:

- Take action to empower rural women in keeping with the regional and international treaties and instruments on human rights, particularly women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Protocol to the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa;
- Give priority, in rural development programmes incorporating women's rights, to innovative approaches that mobilize men and members of rural communities as stakeholders for change and use new information and communication technologies to improve rural women's access to information and technology in all fields, including technology and markets;
- Support and encourage the large-scale replication of initiatives to educate women and community members about women's rights and of legal aid programmes for women in rural areas, as well as any other initiative that contributes to the effective exercise of rural women's political, economic and social rights;
- Promote social dialogue within communities on issues related to traditional and customary practices that prevent women from participating in their community's development on an equal footing with men;
- Accelerate initiatives that help develop gender-disaggregated data collection and use and gender-sensitive budgeting in order to facilitate budgetary planning and the monitoring of budget execution;
- Create and put into operation in all ministerial departments an accountability framework for evaluating outcomes in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment;

Calls upon organizations involved with gender issues to mobilize to hold Governments and development partners accountable with regard to the use of development assistance funds for gender equality and women's empowerment.